

2013

Codex Cacahuatl: A Merchant's Guide to the Cacao Trade in New Spain (manuscript maps and book)

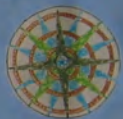
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CODEX CACAHUATL

A MERCHANT'S GUIDE TO
THE CACAO TRADE
in New Spain



*The Present Prospects of Chocolate
Production, with a Description of the
cultivation of Theobroma Cacao and
particular instructions for successful
business in New Spain*

Maia Madison

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INTRODUCTION

Of all the plant species discovered in the abundant colony of New Spain, the tree *Theobroma Cacao* has proven to be most desirable, for its fruit used to make chocolate. The natives have long prepared chocolate with their various spices and flowers, and they consume it often, especially during times of celebration and religious ceremony.

Since the discovery of the tree by Christopher Columbus on his fourth voyage to the new world, and the first official shipment of cacao to Seville in 1585, the Spanish have become great proponents of chocolate and have adapted the flavoring agents and additives to cacao to suit our palate. For merchants, the insatiable desire for chocolate in Europe is a prime opportunity to trade with New Spain.

OF THE PLANT:
THEOBROMA CACAO

Theobroma Cacao is a tree of the genus *Theobroma*. The most common varieties in New Spain are Criollo, Forastero, and Trinitario, of which Criollo is most desirable.



Flowers growing on the trunk and branches of the tree drop their petals to reveal pods ranging from yellow to crimson, or other colors depending on the variety and ripeness. Inside each pod is a pulp which is fermented and made into a drink by some Indians. However, the beans underneath the pulp are most valuable to Spanish merchants.

CULTIVATION

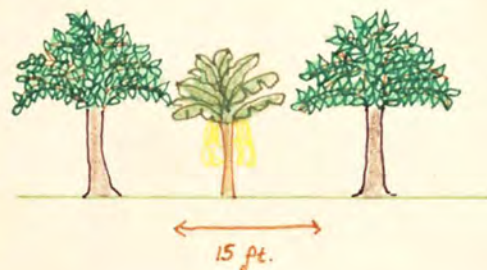


In New Spain, the most productive cacao regions are Tabasco and Soconusco.

Theobroma Cacao grows in a humid climate within the 20th parallels, up to 2,000 feet above sea level. A tree is ready to bear fruit after 5 years of growth, and produces two main crops per year.

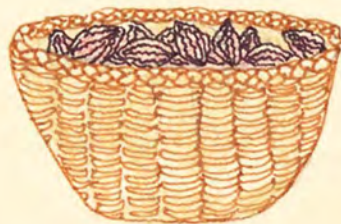
The tree must be shaded, and orchard layout is important. *Theobroma Cacao* are generally planted 15 feet apart, interspersed with shade trees including bananas or capsicum annum peppers.

Vanilla shoots may grow off the bark of the tree itself. Orchards must be carefully protected during the time of maturity of the fruit pods, due to the great value of cacao.



FROM TREE TO TABLE: HARVEST AND PREPARATION

Each pod, when opened, contains 15-40 beans. These must be laid out to ferment for several days before being dried and roasted, after which they are ready to be transported or ground to make chocolate. When the beans have been ground and prepared, they can be formed into a solid disk or tablet.



A disk is later mixed with cold or hot water and combined with other ingredients to make chocolate.



A metate is used to grind cacao.



A molinillo is used to create foam when chocolate is in liquid form.

The chocolate of the natives is made with many spices and additives, one of which is the orejuela. This earflower grows in Vera Cruz and Oaxaca and has a bitter taste that is highly valued. Various types of peppers are included as well.



Vanilla is almost always used, and honey may be added for sweetness.



Chocolate is also often prepared with achiote, which turns the chocolate a dark red color similar to blood; this type is consumed during religious ceremonies or ritual sacrifice.



Maize can be used to make atole.



Spanish chocolate similarly includes vanilla from New Spain as a principal flavor.



Cinnamon from Asia is added in place of the flower-spice complex. Black pepper may replace the orejuela.



Sugar from Cuba is used more often than honey.



Optional additions include musk powder, and almonds and hazelnuts grown in Spain.



OF BUSINESS in Spain

The merchant looking to produce chocolate must first establish trustworthy connections with cacao growers in New Spain. When purchasing from growers, beware of purchasing poor-quality or counterfeit beans.

For those directly involved in cultivation, a mature cacao plantation can be expected to produce about five-hundred pounds per acre.

It is recommended that merchants also specialize in the trade of vanilla and aromatic spices; given their importance in making chocolate, it proves more profitable and convenient. Seville is one of the most important ports; after shipments arrive in Spain, prepared chocolate may then be transported to England and the rest of Europe.

MARKETING

A successful entrepreneur should distinguish their chocolate to customers by developing a special mix of the cacao varieties, which is particular to their company and kept a secret.

The sale of fine drinking vessels can encourage chocolate sales and provide additional profit. Natives of New Spain traditionally drink out of painted gourd vessels or jars, but the most popular items in Spain are cups made of pure silver or decorated porcelain.



The popularity of chocolate renders little need for advertisement in newspapers, but sellers may wish to market its various health benefits as a nourishing and stimulating drink.

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